

I want to share a release put out by Dow Chemical. Mr. Liveris, the CEO, noted that the domestic price of natural gas, which was approximately \$2 per million Btu 6 years ago, exceeded \$6 in February of this year, increased to \$10 in the days just prior to Hurricane Katrina, and then jumped to \$12 immediately after the hurricane struck the gulf coast.

We all know when the first Canadian air comes south and goes all of the way down the coast and jacks up the use of natural gas, and the prices always spike, they will go even higher. When he wrote this, the price of natural gas was \$14, which is equivalent to \$7 per gallon for gasoline and \$28 per gallon for milk. He noted that this renders the United States chemical industry, which uses natural gas as a fuel and a raw material, simply uncompetitive with the rest of the world. It does the same to aluminum, it does the same to brass, it does the same to steel, it does the same to polymers, plastics and fertilizers. Those industries will leave our shores. Several million Americans will not have a decent job, and a lot of them will not have money to take their vacation on our beautiful coastlines.

Mr. PEARCE. Madam Speaker, we had an opportunity to be in the Resources Committee when we had testimony from the union workers in the pulp wood industry and the timber industry in the Northeast. They were there saying that well-meaning individuals told them they could get jobs in tourism. That is what the answer is from the people who would obstruct good solid industries: you can get a job in the tourism industry. Those good workers came before the committee and said we want our jobs, the ones we grew up with and understand. They are good, clean jobs. The trees grow back, they are renewable; and yet there is a deaf ear by many in this country to the plight of working Americans.

I hope that the gentleman's efforts are successful because our future, our economic future in this Nation depends on good policies coming from this body, good choices coming from this body; and I would encourage the gentleman to continue his efforts to have common sense prevail and have us drill for natural gas in the continental U.S. and off the Continental Shelf.

Mr. PETERSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I close with the following statement: what this Congress does in opening up production of natural gas and bringing the price down, allowing our industries to compete and our seniors to heat their homes will depend on whether we remain a leader Nation or become an also-ran Nation. Natural gas is the clean fuel that I think really sets our future, and what we do about it depends on what kind of country we are.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. DRAKE). Under the Speaker's an-

nounced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, it is an honor to be before the House once again. We would like to thank the Democratic leadership for allowing us to have this hour. This is the 30-Something Working Group. Madam Speaker, we come to the floor night after night when we are in session to talk about the differences as it relates to the budget or response to natural disasters or the general functions of the government and how it can be better on behalf of all Americans.

Tonight, as usual, we are joined by the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. DELAHUNT) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN). I would just like to talk for a moment on the issue of budget, just to kind of set the Democratic principles that we have within our budget, our budget alternative to the majority side. And to explain to some of the Members and staff here in the Capitol that as we know, and everyone does not know, that the majority side, because they have more Members here in this House, they actually prevail as it relates to legislation.

They would like to see a budget passed out of the Budget Committee, and it is passed just on simple numbers on partisan lines. We do commend one member of the Republican Caucus for voting with the Democrats for a budget that balanced by 2010, and also does it in a way that does not hurt everyday Americans or will play a counter-productive role in achieving the goal of fiscal responsibility.

The Democratic alternative to the Republican budget, which we will talk about tonight, does balance the budget by 2010. It also makes sure that we include enforcement measures to protect Social Security, making sure that we have budget enforcement procedures there to block tax or spending legislation that would borrow large amounts of money or any amount of money from the Social Security trust fund. I think that is very important to the preservation of Social Security.

Also, we do more for education. There are \$14 billion in cuts that the Republicans have proposed. In our budget, we make no cuts whatsoever because we know education is the future of this country, the whole argument of making sure that our young people are on equal footing, and even adult education is important. Vocational education is important, to make sure that we cannot only compete, but we can be the country to provide young people to make our country strong, not only in the present but in the future.

I think it is important to point out that in our budget we have protection for veterans, some \$1.6 billion more than the Republican budget, and over the next 5 years, \$17 billion more than the Republican budget. The cuts that the Republicans are making to vet-

erans we will talk about a little later. It is very unfortunate that that is a proposal which has been put forth.

Also we have a commitment in our budget to communities and families. I think it is important that we reflect on that, especially during this time when we talk about devolution of taxation. We want to cut certain taxes here and say we are doing a wonderful job and saving families and communities from paying more taxes. In all actuality, the majority side is cutting Medicaid. Medicare will be on the table as it relates to this budget when it goes to conference; if it goes to conference, that is going to turn the clock back on many families, and they are going to have to kick in more to be able to make it happen.

□ 2245

I just wanted to start off really talking about some of our principles within our budget that we would like to see prevail, not only here on this floor, we would also like to see, we talked about last week, that the majority side, the Republicans, respect the spirit of the rules of the House. We know when the budget comes up, if it comes up, the gentleman from Massachusetts has been here longer than any of us here, the majority side, they usually hold the voting clock open not only for several minutes but as of recent several hours to see it their way. There are a number of articles that are out that I know that we are going to reference today that allude to that.

Last week the gentleman from Massachusetts brought out Congress Daily A.M. This is what we get here in the Congress, we get an a.m., a p.m. There is also a Congressional Quarterly magazine that comes out. This is the outlook on the week at the beginning of the week. We all get it here. We find out what is going on in different committees. Here is a story which is the head story, House leadership this week are putting some Members on the spot with the fact that they are going to take one of their toughest votes in recent years. A \$53.9 billion deficit reduction package that is drafted would hit child support enforcement, food stamps, Medicaid beneficiaries and student loans and would open arctic and coastal areas to energy exploration. I think it is important for us to understand that, of course, it is going to be a tough vote because they are calling for tough cuts that is going to hurt America.

Mr. DELAHUNT. If my friend would yield for a moment, I do not know if you are aware or had the opportunity to read the editorial today from the New York Times, but it follows with what we read in the Congressional A.M., so to speak. Let me just read the first paragraph here:

That rare bird, the moderate Republican lawmaker, is suddenly in sight, forcefully objecting to the House leadership's abominable package of budget cuts. The 5-year, \$54 billion proposal is

headed for a floor vote this week disguised as an overdue act of fiscal responsibility and government savings. In truth, it is so over-the-top in its inequities and giveaways that embarrassed moderates are actually rebelling, withholding support unless some of the more outrageous measures are killed.

Again, we do not know what is going to happen this week. The Republicans are having discussions intraparty, clearly without any consultation with our side of the aisle, but we know that is the rule rather than the exception. What we do know, however, is that the Senate Finance Committee reported a bill that cut Medicare, not Medicaid but Medicare, by \$5.7 billion over 5 years and by \$40 billion over 10 years. What does that mean? What can those such as myself who will shortly be eligible for Medicare at age 65 expect in terms of Medicare? There is a group within the Republican caucus called the Republican Study Group. They came in with a proposal to defer that so-called prescription drug benefit for 2 years. I think we are going into very uncertain times, uncharted waters, if you will.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. If the gentleman will yield, I think this brings up a real contrast. First, we have made it a point here in the 30-Something Working Group that this is not about party. This is about doing what is best for the American people. Because together America can be better. I just want to take this opportunity, having talked to all of you already tonight, to just say we hope that the moderate Republicans will stand up, because they can have a tremendous voice in this body. Not in a partisan way but in a way that actually acts on behalf of the American people. We hope that those moderate Republicans step up to bat and help the Democrats moderate some of these drastic cuts that are going to the most disadvantaged and the middle-class people in this country.

I think it is important as the Senate has made cuts out of the Finance Committee of almost \$6 billion, the Medicare program if it comes out of the Senate as is now, \$6 billion in cuts. And then the Republican Study Committee, the most conservative people in this Chamber, want to delay the prescription drug bill. Here is an opportunity where I think they could maybe take a Democrat initiative, a Democratic Party initiative, to reduce the cost of the Medicare prescription drug program. Instead of cut it and reduce benefits for seniors, why not put a provision in the Medicare prescription drug bill that says you can negotiate down the drug prices. Give the Secretary of Health and Human Services the ability to negotiate down like the Veterans' Administration does. Why not let the Secretary of Health and Human Services do that? Why not let the reimportation from Canada to help reduce the cost of drugs? There are a couple of provisions here that will help re-

duce the cost without reducing the benefits to the Medicare recipients.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I think it is important for those who might be viewing our conversation right now for you to explain what you mean by negotiating down in what was in the original prescription drug so-called part D benefit plan that most of us voted against because of its cost and because of the fact that it does not really deliver what senior citizens need in terms of their prescription drugs.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. One of the provisions, as you said, was giving the Secretary of Health and Human Services who basically in his department administers the Medicare part D, this new prescription drug bill, giving him the ability to go to Merck or Pfizer or one of the major drug companies and basically say, on behalf of these millions of Medicare recipients, if you want the contract to sell them drugs, you need to sit down with me and talk price. The Democrats were not saying we need to create a whole new bureaucracy. We did not say we have got to put a whole new office building in Washington, D.C. to do it. Just give the Secretary of Health and Human Services the ability to go and basically negotiate down these drug prices.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Because of the bulk purchasing power.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. The bulk purchasing power, some studies say, would at least save 10 to 15 percent. I have seen some people say it could save up to 20 percent. So you take \$700 billion and you take 10 or 15 or 20 percent of that, you are talking upwards of saving the American taxpayer over the course of the next few years \$140 billion that could go into Katrina relief.

Mr. DELAHUNT. But that did not happen, did it?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. That did not happen. The Republican majority in this Chamber rejected the proposal.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. If the gentleman will yield, I think we should expand this conversation beyond just what this budget reconciliation, budget cut proposal that we will consider this week means. Because what was initially rolled out by the Republican Study Committee after Katrina was this chart that you have right here. I think it would be helpful for us to go through just exactly what the true intentions are of the Republican Caucus. How many Republican members are there in the caucus?

Mr. DELAHUNT. There are 228 Republican members here in this Chamber.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. So 228 members of their caucus and more than 100 of those members, it is my understanding, are members of the Republican Study Committee. So the vast majority of the Republican Caucus subscribes to this proposal that the Republican Study Committee put forward which is really what they would do if they could get their moderate Republicans who are not members of the

study committee to swallow it. And because they know that they are in a precarious situation in their own elections in many instances, they are the ones that have been waffling on the fence here.

Let us go through what the Republicans would do if they had their way. They would delay the Medicare prescription drug bill for 1 year which the gentleman from Ohio already mentioned. They would reduce Medicaid administrative spending. But they would go further than that. They would increase the allowable copays in Medicaid. Let us describe what that means. Fully one in four children in the United States of America today get their health care from Medicaid. Often I know when people think of Medicaid, they think of it as really just purely a health care system that provides health care access to the poor. But if one in four children are getting their health care from Medicaid, that means you have that many children living in poverty in the United States of America. What this proposal would do by increasing the copays is requiring poor children's families to come more out of pocket to pay for their health care.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I just want to expound on that point for just one second. Those people who will see an increase in their copay will then not go to utilize the care and the service, and they will end up like Americans who do not have any health care, they will end up in an emergency room much sicker than they were when they originally could have had the problem taken care of because they were covered under Medicaid, and the taxpayer is going to end up footing the bill in the long run. We are not making this argument solely for moral reasons, but this is an economic argument that is going to save the taxpayer money in the long run and I think the Republican majority has proven in many ways that they do not know how to govern, and one of the reasons is they would rather spend more money on the tail end than do the right thing and spend it up front.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. If that were not bad enough, if making poor children's families pull more money out of their pocket to pay for their health care were not bad enough, the Republican Study Committee, in fact, more than that, this budget cut proposal that we are going to consider this week would allow increases in premiums for the first time and it would also let health care providers, physicians and other health care providers that are Medicaid providers, refuse care if a beneficiary cannot afford the copayment. Right now they are not able to refuse that care. There is a change in this proposal that would allow people who provide health care to Medicaid recipients to refuse care if they do not have the money to pull out of their pocket. Often we hear the argument made about the skyrocketing costs of Medicaid, the greater percentage that Medicaid has taken of the

Federal budget and of State budgets. While that may be true, what the gentleman from Ohio has just outlined is absolutely accurate. These cuts, which are supposed to be representative of savings, there is not going to be savings. It is just going to be more cost shifting of health care costs. Because these people who are on Medicaid now, they have to get their health care from somewhere. Most good parents, any good parent is not going to let their child suffer. What they do is instead of being able to take their children to the doctor for well baby visits and well child visits and make sure that the health care is preventive as opposed to reactionary and sickness and disease based, they have to wait till their child is sick enough to take to the emergency room.

I was walking door to door when I first ran for the State legislature and knocked on the door of a younger woman, it turned out. Usually when I was knocking door to door, it was senior citizens who took a long time to get to the door. But this woman, I was surprised when she answered the door, was young. Her foot was swollen to a grotesque proportion. I could not help but ask her what happened. She said I actually had caught her just as she was about to go out the door to the emergency room because she did not have health insurance and she was not able to go to the doctor when the problem on her foot was small, she had to wait till it was so infected that she had to go to the emergency room. Of course she had no health insurance and she did not qualify for Medicaid in this instance. So now what we should do is talk about the gap between people who qualify for Medicaid and people who have health insurance. There are a vast amount of people in the middle who fall through the crack.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. That woman probably called off work and there was a ripple effect.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Loss of productivity by her employer. Just think about the impact of people who cannot go to work when they are sick.

□ 2300

Think about the skyrocketing costs of health care and this administration. Ask yourself, Madam Speaker, ask yourself the last time you heard President Bush say anything about health care. I have not heard him say a word about health care. I have not heard him speak out against Medicaid cuts. I have not heard him speak in favor of helping poor children and their families afford health care. Where is the outrage?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Let us look at another provision on here that the Republican Study Committee is also looking to do: Increase the Medicare Part B premium by \$4.6 billion.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That might be a little bit of Washington-speak. I think people might get the letters confused. What is Medicare Part B?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Medicare Part B is the senior citizen program, the Medicare program that insures our parents and our grandparents. This is where the Republican Study Committee is going to go to pay for the tax cuts, to pay for the \$16 billion in subsidies that they are giving to the oil companies, to pay for the subsidies that they are basically giving to the prescription drugs. They are going to go to our senior citizens and ask them to give up \$4.6 billion in 2006 and \$84 billion over the course of the next 10 years. These are senior citizens that, as I am sure they are in your district, whose pension is not going up, if they can even keep their pension. Health care costs obviously are going up here, the cost of natural gas and gasoline, heating oil, all of this is affecting how our seniors can actually survive day-to-day; and our friends on the other side are making another wrong decision by going after them and asking them to foot the bill.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Speaker, if the gentleman recalls a few months ago when we were talking about Social Security privatization and the impact that that would have on our seniors, imagine if that proposal had gone through and, hopefully, we are going to continue to be able to keep that off the table. But when we were on the floor during the 30-Something Working Group, my colleagues will recall that one of the things that we talked about so often was that we have so many of our senior citizens who are on fixed incomes, whose Social Security is their only source of survival.

Now, if what the Republican Study Committee would like to see happen happens, where they increase Medicare Part B premiums, which is out-of-pocket money that these seniors have to pay, and one day soon we privatize Social Security, how are these people going to be able to afford to live?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, let me just say this. I will not say the Republican Study Committee, I will say the Republican Conference. I mean, the bottom line is, we would not have the philosophy of a few come to the floor, pass the Budget Committee, and possibly a threat for it to come to the floor by the end of the week if it was not for the help of the Republican Conference.

Now, they are our friends. We are coffee together, we ride the elevator together, we walk down the hall together, we talk about raising our children, and all of the things that people do who work together. We all work together, but we have a difference in philosophy and priorities. And I will tell my colleagues right now, and I just want to make sure that Members, if you have a family member that is a veteran, I want you to go grab them because I am about to say something. I want to make sure that we understand that these cuts, and we are talking about 60 million Americans, 60 million

that are on Medicaid right now, enrolled in Medicaid, 60 million Americans, not 60 million Iraqis, not 60 million Somalians, 60 million Americans who pay their taxes every day, that know what it means to punch in and punch out at work every day, know what it means to have a 15-minute lunch break, or a break in the morning if they get it, 15 minutes in the afternoon, and a 30-minute lunch break, if they get it. These are the people that we are talking about. Also, children are enrolled in this, too. So it is very, very important.

I am looking here at the Families USA, which is a voice for health care consumers. I mean, basically they are saying these cuts, this proposal, will force low-income people to pay, like you said, higher premiums that they cannot afford, and copayments. So let us just call it what it is.

It looks good when you look at the numbers and, oh, these are the cuts that we are making, but let us translate what those cuts mean. It means that for the premiums and copayments that people are making under the Medicaid plan now, which is not the greatest, because this Republican Congress has increased it time after time, now we are about to do it again. They are not going to be able to afford health care. So we might as well say that we do not have it.

We have companies now that are telling people to go and enroll in Medicaid, because they we do not have a national health care plan. They cannot participate in that program. So when folks start talking about weaning people off, let us talk about this. I have also said, we talk about the difference between Democrats and Republicans.

Now, here is one for the veterans that allowed us to be here under the lights in this Chamber, fought for this country, still fighting for this country, and also I want to call special attention to our Members who come to the floor and give great floor speeches about how we love the troops. Well, I have not seen a Member come to the floor yet and say, hey, listen, I do not like the troops. So to say that I care about the troops, we all care about the troops. We all want to make sure the troops are okay. But what happens when they come home? What happens? What happens when, after the parade, what happens? What happens after they turn their uniform in? What happens to those individuals? Let me tell you what is going to happen under this budget.

The bottom line is that the Republican budget cuts that are being made in health care are \$14 million below current service over the next 5 years.

Now, I am going to tell my colleagues something. Maybe I represent too many veterans. Maybe I have heard too many stories about when someone who wants to see an ophthalmologist or a podiatrist or some sort of specialty at the VA, and they have to wait 6 months for an appointment, 6 months for an appointment, and in rural areas

it is even worse. There are areas where they have VA facilities and clinics that are only open once or twice a month.

And under this budget, with a straight face, they are going to come to the floor, and that is the reason why periodical after periodical is saying that it is hard for the Republican Conference to even vote for their own budget. Now, folks come to the floor, well, we want our friends on the Democratic side, if they could support us; yes, we want to balance the budget, but we do not want the veterans who have been waiting 6 months now to have to wait a year, because the majority side has made a 5-year cut of \$14 billion. That is not chicken feed; that is a lot of money.

And then it goes further. Because facts hurt, facts hurt. Reality hurts.

We are here to make sure that we give voice to those Americans that sent us here. Some folks use it very loosely: This is the people's House. Well, guess what? We believe it. We do not use it as a punch line. We are here because people have elected us.

Furthermore, it goes on to require the Veterans' Affairs Committee to make \$798 million in additional cuts over the next 5 years. Also it imposes new fees for veterans for health care by reducing veterans' benefits such as disability payments, pension benefits, and educational benefits.

Now, let me tell my colleagues something. Like we say sometimes, let us put the cookie on the bottom shelf. The bottom line is that folks are sugar-coating a number. We are making these cuts and we have to do this. One says we have to do it on behalf of the Katrina Commission. Another person says, well, we want the Katrina Commission, but because of Hurricane Katrina, we have to respond to those individuals. Some say, well, we have to make sure that we reduce the national debt and that is the reason we are making these cuts.

And we all know that even in the Senate there is a lot of chest-beating, because there is a \$6 billion tax break, mainly for the top bracket and mainly for the special interests that they are going to push through this chamber. Why? Because if there is going to be a tax cut, there should be a tax cut that is going to help every day Americans. But how can we with a straight face, when we have veterans waiting 6 months for basic health care, when we have folks in devastated areas, with the three natural disasters that we have had, that cannot even get a housing voucher that were made homeless because of the natural disaster, when we have a government that is trying to figure out how we are going to continue to pay for the war in Iraq, how we are going to be able to pay for incompetence, incompetence in the government.

□ 2310

How we are going to continue to condone cronyism, a culture of cronyism

at the same time? The bottom line is, ladies and gentlemen, I believe the majority side really needs to have a meeting. They need to have a meeting and talk about the true priorities of America. And then, one of those points in that meeting should be, you know, we really need to move in a bipartisan way. Oh, wow. That is a great idea. Hey, let us work with the Democrats and Republicans and let us save the country.

Now, I am coming in for a landing now. I am going to tell you something. People are saying, why are you all on the floor every night? Why? Why are you on the floor every night? Some people are saying it is a great thing, Democrats and Republicans. We are glad the people are breaking this thing down so that we can all understand, because we can use CBO and all the acronyms and folks can come to the floor and say we want to make America stronger. What I am describing here is making a country weaker, not because of the country and the people that live in it, but the leadership that is supposed to govern it on behalf of making this country stronger.

These are the facts. Third-party validators, these are the facts, like it or not. One other fact, and Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, I am getting ready to yield to you, I am going to take this chart out. You know, if I could, Mr. RYAN, I would put this chart on the front of my truck so that people can see it. If I had the resources, I would get a billboard so that people understand what is going on. This is not a woof speech. This is a reality speech. The bottom line is that the majority that is in control now, need it be the House or Senate or need it be the White House, the policies that they are putting forth are not helping and strengthening our country. Period. Dot.

I do not want to make it seem like it is some sort of extreme statement. It is not an extreme statement. What I just described was happening to veterans. The last 15 minutes we talked about what is happening to Medicaid, and Medicare is on the table, Mr. DELAHUNT. The bottom line is 42 Presidents, 1776, we were not even thought of, you know, as Members in this House here. To the year 2000, 42 Presidents, \$1.01 trillion that we borrowed from foreign nations. President Bush, not by himself, with the Republican majority, not by himself, I just want to make sure that everyone understands that the President does not have the ability to do this all by himself. Trust me. 1.05 trillion from foreign nations, Mr. RYAN, including China.

And so I think it is important that people understand. This is not Democratic talk. This is not Independent talk. This is not even Republican talk. This is reality. And unless we rise up, I just want to make sure that we let the Members know we know exactly, on a majority side you can have a study group. You can have a caucus

within the caucus. You can have subcommittees. The bottom line is the policy will never see the light of day if it was not for the Republican majority here in this House pushing it to the floor.

And that is the reason why, that is the reason why you have Republican conference members that have big problems. They are, you know, they are even looking at their calendar saying, well, goodness it is my son's birthday on Saturday. Maybe I can tell leadership we are going to celebrate it on Thursday because I do not want to be here for this vote because how can I explain back home how we are increasing the wait list for veterans, how we are cutting benefits for your children to go to college, and we are going to put the responsibility on your back to take up the slack because we want to give tax cuts to special interests to billionaires.

I mean, that is a hard thing to explain, especially when you are by yourself back in your district and you are not hiding behind the press release from the majority office of this House of Representatives. And that is the fact, Jack. And the bottom line is we are going to man up and woman up and leader up and say no. And that is the reason why it has not been to the floor, and I hope that is the reason why it will not come to the floor in its present form and that we go into, if we had rule XXI, which we do have rule XXI here in the House, but if we had a rule XXI like the Senate, we should go into closed session. Folks grab the mike, the leadership, and the bottom line is work out a plan that we can all work together, take from the Democratic budget, the Republican budget and do what Americans want us to do. They do not want us here talking about one another back and forth. But the bottom line is that is the road map that has been laid out by the majority. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. And you know it is totally understandable why you are emotional about it and why we are all emotional about it. We are all bristling with indignation here because to add insult to injury, the nightmare scenario you are describing for veterans if this budget reconciliation bill actually becomes a reality is just the tip of iceberg. Just a few months ago, I mean, I am a freshman. I just got here. And there are a lot of things that have shocked me, not the least of which is what you referred to a little while ago which is that we almost never meet in a bipartisan fashion. The idea of actually seeing Members from the other side of the aisle sit down at a meeting like you just described, at the beginning of this year, you know, to me would have been a usual matter, like we did in the legislature, coming together on most things and arguing about only the most basic of Republican and Democratic differences.

Here it is like they think we do not take showers or something. I am not

really certain why it is that they will not actually sit down with us and try to work things out. But what was more startling just a couple of months later was that, you know, we have talked about the number of Cs that apply to their ability to govern. There is corruption, there is the cronyism, and then there is the lack of competence. I mean, I could not believe that in June we had to actually appropriate \$1.5 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs because there was a shortfall in their budget that they were denying for months. Months. We kept insisting there was a shortfall. Veterans were having to wait months and months for health care. The 6-month wait for access to health care at the VA was a true reality.

And we were saying there is something wrong here. The American Legion was saying something was wrong here. And finally they owned up and realized oh, yeah, we do have a shortfall and we are going to need, we had to go and pass an emergency appropriations bill to get them the rest of the money they need.

You know, we talk about the third-party validators here. Now there is a proposal to cut \$600 million out of this budget in veterans health care, which would be enough funds to care for nearly 100,000 veterans. The American Legion, this is this evening's third-party validator for me on veterans, expressed concern that that cut would mean rationing of care, hiring freezes of medical personnel, delaying repairs on facilities, growing backlogs of medical equipment, and many other fiscal-based constraints. And that was a letter that they wrote on October 17.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, would you just yield for a second.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Yes, I would be happy to.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. What holiday is coming up?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I think that would be Veterans Day, and that is Friday.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. And it is very interesting because Members are going to be trying to run out of here and catch planes and falling over each other to go march in a parade with those that have laid down, literally put their lives on the line, lost limbs. Some will be pushed in wheelchairs. Some will be remembering the fallen members of our country that went and fought in all of the past conflicts. And just before Friday, there is a vote scheduled to set them back and what we told them we would do for them and provide them for health care. I yield back. I just wanted to talk about the gall of this whole thing at this particular time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Gall is a soft word, the softest word you could use. I really want to go ahead and transition to Mr. DELAHUNT, who is going to go through some more of this.

Mr. DELAHUNT. No, I want to commend all of you for your eloquence,

your commitment. I think you ought to describe, you know, how this particular group was formed. I know I really speak for the other members of the Democratic Caucus when I say that we are very proud of your commitment, your hard work, and your dedication to the American people, because you are 30-something. You are all under 40. But it is really impressive. And I have to tell you that in many ways you are leaders now, but I am confident that you represent the future; and as more and more people listen to you, particularly people of your generation, they are going to think about these issues in a more serious way. They are going to educate themselves, because you are presenting reality.

You know, I would describe what the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) said is that tragically there is a great difference between walking the walk and talking the talk. It is great to talk about patriotism. You are right. There is going to be a lot of speeches on November 11, and terms and phrases such as a "debt of gratitude" to our veterans, to the men and women that have served this country and are currently serving our country now, whether it be Iraq, Afghanistan or in the multiple deployments of our armed services.

□ 2320

The gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is so right. The reality is that when they come home, will they have good quality health care available to them? Will they have access to the kind of care that they deserve? Will they receive the benefits that the generations that served in World War II, that served in the Korean War, in Vietnam have?

And the gentleman is right. There just simply are not the resources there. We can paper it over by passing supplementary or emergency budgets just to get through a difficult time. But I would suggest to our veterans to listen to their leadership and what they have said about the budget proposals on veterans' health care that have been put forth time and time and time again by the Republican Party in this House. We all see letters describing them in various terms.

Now, I am speaking of the American Legion, the VFW, the Disabled Veterans of America, the Paralyzed Veterans of America. The word that comes to my mind is a disgrace, a shame, and a dishonor to the veterans.

The gentleman speaks about third party validators to corroborate the facts as we are presenting them. Do not listen to us. Go to the leadership of these veterans service organizations if you are a veteran and ask. Unfortunately, what we are saying is truthful and accurate, and I would suggest that while we might be talking the talk, what reveals our real character is the commitment that we make. We can go and speak to the troops and tell them that we care, but we all have to make some sacrifice.

We have an all-volunteer Army and we are comfortable here. And most people in this country, because of the policies of this government, are not involved in the sacrifices that are currently being made by our military personnel all over the world. We owe it to them. It is just not policy. It is a moral obligation.

We speak of values. And I daresay that when we turn our backs by our actions on our veterans that we are not living up to the values and the moral authority that we proclaim again and again. We are indulging in hypocrisy, and that is all too sad.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, one of the decisions that is being made down here as we cut the vets' budget, there is a chart that explains where some of the tax cuts are going and you will see of all the tax cuts down here, \$34,000 to \$54,000, \$840. And people who make \$440,000 a year and up, \$87,600.

Now, to put this into "middle America speak," the Democrats are for reducing a small little portion of this, not even the whole thing, but asking these people who make a million dollars a year or more to just give up a wee little bit of that up there, just a small little tiny part of that so that we can fund some of these other priorities that we have agreed as a country are important, like making sure our veterans have the proper amount of health care.

And if, as a country, the leadership in this Chamber and the leadership in the White House, especially in the executive branch, if they do not have the guts to ask this person who makes a half a million dollars a year to give up just a small amount, a few thousand dollars of their tax cut to pay for veterans health care or to pay for Medicare, if the President of the United States cannot find it in his Constitution to ask this person, then I believe he is failing his responsibility and his oath of office. And I really believe that because that is about leadership.

To go to the person who does not have a lobby group on K Street to come over here and lobby us, okay, that is a major problem. And at the same time as these tax cuts are going on, we are cutting student loans, we are increasing the burden on our kids who go to college. And if the Republican majority—as the gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. DELAHUNT) pointed out, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is a freshmen. The gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) and I are in our second term. The gentleman from Massachusetts (Mr. DELAHUNT) has been here four or five terms. He is on his fifth term, I believe. If the Republican majority thinks that we are going to sit up in our office or if we are going to go home and lie on our couch and turn on C-SPAN and just watch this happen, they have got another think coming.

We are going to come to the floor every night if we can and we are going to grab every hour that we possibly can

because there are 700,000 people in northeast Ohio that count on me to come down here and talk about this stuff, because they are on the other end of this stick. Fifty percent of the people in my district did not even get a tax cut. They did not get any of this stuff, none of it. Fifty percent of the taxpayers in my district did not get any of this stuff. And if this administration and the leadership in this House does not think that we are going to come to the floor and talk about this inequity, about them cutting Medicaid services, which in the long term costs these taxpayers even more money, if they think we are going to sit by while tuition goes up 57 percent over the last 5 years and not say anything, they have got another think coming.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, those are the same constituents and my constituents that are going to get hit by the Medicaid cuts, the same veterans that will be paying more on their copayments, waiting longer for their services. Those are the same individuals that the gentleman is describing. And the gentleman is 110 percent right, and I am glad that he is warning the majority that this stuff is not going to be quiet.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We are not going away. We will be here every night if we have to.

The problem is, and here is the problem that hurts me the most, is that the people who make a half a million dollars, a million dollars a year, they make it because of the benefits that have been given to them and the opportunity that has been given to them by our veterans, to be able to take advantage of a capitalistic system, to be able to take advantage of a democratic system with a strong military to make sure that you can make solid business investment and make money.

Bill Gates did not invent the Internet. It was the public tax dollars that went to do the research. Bill Gates capitalized on the Internet. So he has a responsibility to keep the system going for the next guy, but to do this and to not have the guts to pay for these people, to pay for veterans' health care benefits.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) was referring to the guts that they lack. It has been clear to me, and increasingly clear as the months go by, that they do not have the guts or the ability in their constitutional makeup, like the gentleman said, continuing with the C-word theme, it is their culture of cronyism that does not allow them. Their culture that propels them to take care of the people at the top and only those at the top.

□ 2330

So they do not have the ability to comprehend at least not the way I perceive it, that they are doing the wrong thing.

The culture of corruption and cronyism just continues, and although it

is somewhat off topic, I think it is important because the last few times we have been here we have been talking about just their general lack of ethics and their commitment to taking care of their cronies as opposed to the American people.

We have been calling on the floor of this House for the President to fire Karl Rove, to at least ask him to step down, to eliminate the weight that is standing on his chest and the chests of the American people and our ability to actually move forward.

Do you know what his response was to calls across the country to get rid of Karl Rove? He ordered his staff in the White House to take an ethics course this week. That is what he has asked them to do. Right there in black and white, the Associated Press reported it. His response to this entire mess is that his White House staff should take an ethics class.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Hello, ethics course? Hello. No. Like I told you once before, I do not blame the special interests for getting what they get because they do not get it unless the Republican majority gives it to them, because they are in the majority. Many of the unexplainable events that have taken place here on this floor and in committee, the mind boggling, how can that pass, how could they get all of this money, all this taxpayer money from the Congress? They do not do it. The vote has to go up on the board for them to allow them to do it.

I will say the same thing as it relates to the President, not a mumbling word from this House on outing a CIA agent. All of the speeches that were given here in this well right before me, give us the responsibility of national security, we are tough, we will make sure that we have what we need to have and we will fight the war on terror. And guess what? Someone in the White House, two people in the White House, probably even more, out a CIA agent, a CIA agent that did what? Went out to make sure that we were able to head off countries from getting weapons of mass destruction.

This is not a small issue. For far less, far less, the House of Representatives have called out Travelgate, White-water, all these kind of individual decisions that were made and had some possible ethic issues going along with it, but not the outing of a CIA agent, not saying, hey, you know something, she is a CIA agent and there are a number of people that are working with her, and we want you to know about it. Not a mumbling word out of this House, not one floor speech calling for resignations, not one committee cranking up a committee meeting and calling people from the White House down here before the people's House to question how could this happen, not one. Not one.

Guess what. If the Democrats were in the majority, I would tell you right now Democrat House, Republican White House, there will be hearings,

and not a mumbling word, just crickets on that side of the aisle as it relates to outing a CIA agent.

So what you are saying is not alarming. The President is doing that because he is allowed to do it because the investigative body here in the House that has the responsibility of keeping this government in check is not doing its job.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Can I just tell you, it gets worse. It is not just the fact that they are responding to this entire fiasco, ethical conflict, with ethics classes for the White House staff. Do you know who is giving the classes? The White House counsel's office, Harriet Miers' office. That is part of their pattern. It is not like they decided they should go somewhere outside the White House, because clearly the White House has not been emblematic of an ethical place where you could actually learn ethics from someone inside the White House. You would think they would have gone outside the White House, but they do not believe in independence.

We asked them to establish an independent Katrina commission. No. Their answer was to do it internally and create a special committee here that is lopsided, 11 Republicans and right now no Democrats because we refuse to serve on a committee that is not going to be fair and objective and really get to the bottom of it.

The bottom line, the reason I brought this up is because your point is from the top to the bottom, the culture of corruption and cronyism and incompetence just runs right through. There is not any light at the end of the tunnel, and it gets worse with every page you turn in this administration.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, can we just say, if you have worked in the White House for 5 years and you are the chief of staff of the Vice President, indicted on five counts of lying and obstruction of justice, and you have the deputy chief of staff of the President of the United States lie to the American people on two occasions, you have the Vice President of the United States mislead on several occasions Tim Russert and the American people, you do not need ethics courses. You need to be fired. Okay. This is not brain surgery. This is probably a basic management technique. If you lie to the American people and you work at the White House, you should be fired, and there should be no place for you in representing the public.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. National security. National security. It is not lying about, well, you know, I flew to Chicago and I really did not have Federal business and I am sorry, the ticket was \$450; I need to go to an ethics course. You do need to go to an ethics course.

You out a CIA agent; it goes far beyond a firing. This is not an everyday occurrence. Maybe I am just too concerned about the security of this country. Maybe I am just too concerned about it, and I do not think I am out of

step by being alarmed by this because I can tell you right now there are some Members on that side that are alarmed about it, but they are not saying anything. Definitely the leadership is not saying anything, and the White House would do what it is allowed to do.

If it is allowed to borrow \$1.05 trillion from foreign countries, it will do it. If it is allowed to have our veterans waiting in longer lines to cut their benefits and have them pay higher co-pays and Medicare individuals and free and reduced lunches cut in half, they will do it. It is up to this House to rise up, and the majority's just not doing it. We can only do it for so much as it relates to bringing this back into check.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Madam Speaker, I would just make another observation.

Again, we hear much in terms of our public discourse about values and about responsibility towards our fellow citizens, and yet, I was really struck by a headline that appeared in USA Today last week. The headline was "Louisiana Cannot Pay Katrina and Rita Bills."

The Federal Government is requiring the State of Louisiana to come up with almost \$4 billion as its share for relief from the devastation of those two hurricanes. They have no tax base left practically. New Orleans we know has been devastated. The entire annual budget for the State of Louisiana is \$8 billion. It is as if we are turning our back on other Americans, and yet we are giving away billions of dollars without any strings attached, with no matching fund requirements when it comes to Iraq.

Madam Speaker, we are paying for roads in Iraq. We are paying for affordable housing in Iraq. We are paying for dams and levees in Iraq. The American taxpayer will not see a dime in return, and yet, when it comes to our fellow citizens, we are saying if you want that share, come up with \$4 billion that they do not have.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, we are winding down here. There is one statement, and then we are going to close because we have a minute.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Just one quick statement. We want to remind everyone that tomorrow is election day in many places, Virginia, California, New York, New Jersey. We want to urge our generation to come out in the record numbers that they came out during the 2004 elections.

□ 2340

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Just a reminder to send us e-mails at 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov, any articles or whatever, Madam Speaker, from our colleagues here so that we can talk about them on air. That is 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. With that, we want to thank the Democratic leadership for this block of time, and I yield back the balance of our time.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. BACA (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. BECERRA (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. CARDIN (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Ms. KILPATRICK of Michigan (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today and November 8.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of official business in the district.

Ms. MCKINNEY (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. STUPAK (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of family commitments.

Ms. WATERS (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. GIBBONS (at the request of Mr. BLUNT) for today on account of business in the district.

Mr. GUTKNECHT (at the request of Mr. BLUNT) for today and until 3:00 p.m. November 8 on account of meeting with the New Zealand ambassador on trade issues.

Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky (at the request of Mr. BLUNT) for today on account of personal reasons.

Mr. RYAN of Wisconsin (at the request of Mr. BLUNT) for today on account of a family medical emergency.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Ms. KAPTUR) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. EMANUEL, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. KAPTUR, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. MCCAUL of Texas) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. MCCAUL of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana, for 5 minutes, today and November 8, 9, and 10.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. OSBORNE, for 5 minutes, today, and November 8 and 9.

Mr. POE, for 5 minutes, November 8.

Mr. MCHENRY, for 5 minutes, November 8 and 9.

(The following Member (at his own request) to revise and extend his remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. BURGESS, for 5 minutes, today.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 41 minutes p.m.), under its previous order, the House adjourned until Tuesday, November 8, 2005, at 9 a.m., for morning hour debates.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 8 of rule XII, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

5003. A letter from the Legal Advisor to the Bureau Chief, Media Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, transmitting the Commission's final rule—Amendment of Section 73.202(b), Table of Allotments, FM Broadcast Stations. (Fisher and Thief River Falls, Minnesota) [MB Docket No. 05-116; RM-11188] received November 1, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

5004. A letter from the Legal Advisor to the Bureau Chief, Media Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, transmitting the Commission's final rule—Amendment of Section 73.202(b), Table of Allotments, FM Broadcast Stations. (Cridersville, Ohio) [MB Docket No. 04-343; RM-10799] received November 1, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

5005. A letter from the Legal Advisor to the Bureau Chief, Media Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, transmitting the Commission's final rule—Amendment of Section 73.202(b) Table of Allotments, FM Broadcast Stations. (Cheyenne and Thomas, Oklahoma) [MB Docket No. 05-130; RM-11216; RM-11265] received November 1, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

5006. A letter from the Legal Advisor to the Bureau Chief, Media Bureau, Federal Communications Commission, transmitting the Commission's final rule—Amendment of Section 73.202(b) FM Table of Allotments, FM Broadcast Stations. (Big Pine Key, Florida) [MB Docket No. 04-248; RM-10990] received November 1, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

5007. A letter from the Director, Fish and Wildlife Services, Department of the Interior, transmitting the Department's final rule—Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants; Final Rule to List the Scimitar-horned Oryx, Addax, and Dama Gazelle as Endangered (RIN: 1018-AI82) received November 1, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Resources.

5008. A letter from the Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, NMFS, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, transmitting the Administration's final rule—Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Northern Rockfish in the Central Regulatory Area of the Gulf of Alaska [Docket No. 041126333-5040-02; I.D. 082905B] received November 1, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Resources.

5009. A letter from the Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, NMFS, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, transmitting the Administration's final rule—Fisheries of the Economic Exclusive Zone Off Alaska; Shallow-Water Species Fishery by Vessels Using Trawl Gear in the Gulf of Alaska [Docket No. 041126333-5040-02; I.D. 082905D], pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Resources.